



Violence, the police and the public in modern England

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“Living with the people, but not of the people, they [the police] feel like a mercenary force quartered in a strange and alien land”. H. R. P. Gamon, *The London Police Court, today and tomorrow* (1907)

“Some civilians fear us and play up to us, some dislike us and keep out of our way but no one - well, very few indeed - accepts us as just ordinary like them.... [W]e’re just like hostile troops occupying an enemy country”. Colin McINNES, *Mr Love and Mr Justice*, 1964

Policing in late-twentieth century England is seen to be in crisis by a number of commentators¹. Public perceptions have been profoundly influenced by dramatic events on the streets of several English cities which dated from the late 1960s. Demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and apartheid in South Africa gave rise to ugly scenes which shocked many television viewers. Violence, not respect, was on view as protesters attacked the police and policemen assaulted protesters. Worse was to follow: the miners’ strike of 1984 led to violent confrontations that were, once again, brought home (literally) by televi-

¹ See for example A. FARRELL, *Crime, Class & Corruption: the politics of the police*, London, Bookmarks, 1992, J. LEA & J. YOUNG, *What is to be done about law and order?*, London, Pluto Press, 1993, G. NORTHAM, *Shooting in the Dark: Riot Police in Britain*, London, Faber & Faber, 1989, P. SCRATON, *The State of the Police*, London, Pluto Press, 1985 and D. ROSE, *In the name of the Law: the Collapse of Criminal Justice*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1996.



sion. But perhaps the most shocking scenes came with the inner-city riots of the early and mid-1980s, and particularly the disturbances in Tottenham on 6 October 1985. The old mythology was shattered by images of para-military riot squads facing petrol bombs thrown by youths on the Broadwater Farm estate². Violent, often large-scale attacks on the police, not to mention incidents of police brutality, became but the most publicised aspects of the crisis in policing. Further, the sense of crisis has been heightened by a popular belief, among constables and commentators, that these incidents represent a dramatic departure from past practices. Late-twentieth century debate has been conditioned, in part at least, by a historical perspective, often implicit but sometimes explicit, that is essentially whiggish and sees the police history in terms of progress and associated with a distinctive form of low or non-violent policing. Given these assumptions about the nature and evolution of English policing, the purpose of this paper is to look at these recent events in the wider context of the development of policing since the introduction of the new police in the second quarter of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of the Great War (1914) and, more specifically, to consider the nature and extent of violence (both public on police and police on public) during these years.

The creation of a policed society was one of the fundamental long-term developments of the nineteenth century but it is important to stress that the history of English policing was and continues to be interpreted in very contrasting ways³. For early police historians it was a progressive and largely unproblematic phenomenon⁴. Police

² There were other important elements in this change of perception. Revelations about police corruption and concern about miscarriages of justice involving brutality by the police were very important.

³ Good surveys of the development of English policing can be found in C. EMSLEY, *The English Police: a political and social history*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991 and D. TAYLOR, *The new police in nineteenth century England: crime, conflict and control*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997.

⁴ See particularly the books by C. REITH, *The Police Idea*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1938, *The British Police and the Democratic Ideal*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1942, *A Short History of Policing*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1948 and *A New Study of Police History*, London,



reform was presented as a rational response to a crisis in law and order and the new police, unlike their counterparts in many other countries, as a disciplined and professional force for whom concepts of “policing by consent” and “the use of minimal force” were central to both their philosophy and practice. Notions of the superiority of British (or more accurately English) policing, dating from the early twentieth century if not before, reached their peak in the years following the second world war in both academic circles and popular culture, such as the 1950 film, *The Blue Lamp*. Dixon of Dock Green may have been a fictional character but for many people he embodied all that was best in the British “bobby”. The Dixon myth also carried an important sub-text: the superiority of the law-abiding British citizen who not simply accepted but respected the agents of law and order as embodied in the bobby on the beat.

The historical roots of this myth were challenged by a number of historians and political commentators in the 1970s who emphasized the more partisan role of the police in unequal and conflict-ridden society. Orthodox historians had emphasised the distinction between law-breakers, on the one hand, who were seen as a distinct and threatening group outside society, and the law-abiding masses who, irrespective of class, were seen to have a common interest in and commitment to the upholding of the law, thereby creating a shared interest between the police and the policed, but law-abiding, members of society. In contrast, revisionist historians have emphasised the way in which the law, from legislation to implementation, is shaped by the unequal distribution of power within society. Thus, groups with limited access to power -whether because of class, gender, ethnicity or religion- are not simply disadvantaged but discriminated against. Therefore, in the same way that society as a whole is divided by conflicting interests, so the police and the policed are set apart because the law and policing, from this point of view, is the enforcement of the beliefs of one section of society upon another⁵.

Oliver & Boyd, 1956. A similar point of view is to be found in T. A. CRITCHLEY, *A History of Police in England and Wales*, London, Constable, 1967.

⁵ Notably in two articles by R. D. STORCH, ‘The Plague of Blue Locusts: police reform and popular resistance in northern England, 1840-57’, in *International review of Social History*, 20, 1975 and ‘The policeman as do-



This fundamental clash of opinion necessitates a closer look at the nature of police work. There is an understandable commonsense view of policing as being about crime fighting. Indeed, since the introduction of the Metropolitan police, great emphasis has been placed on this role but such rhetoric obscures the complexity of police work. Fighting crime, preserving the peace and responding in emergencies and disasters co-exist with more regulatory and welfare functions. More importantly, police work is complex because of the ambiguities that surround it. Recent writers on present-day policing, for example, have stressed the "moral ambiguity" that surrounds certain aspects of policing. P. A. J. Waddington, discussing the handling of riots, which he defines as a battle between two groups prepared to use violence for what they see as "the common good", notes that

contrary to the usual police justification, public order policing is *not* the maintenance of order but the maintenance of a *particular order*. [Further] if the law is itself unjust or sanctions injustice, then enforcing it is tainted. Inevitably, that means defending the vested interests that inhere within the established order and resisting the alternative order that protesters wish to establish. [Thus] the clash of opposing moral orders leaves public order policing in a morally ambiguous position⁶.

Not everyone would accept all of this analysis. It can be argued that the police are licensed to use legitimate violence in a way that protesters are not and that riots are more complex, even contradictory phenomena, but there is widespread acceptance that riots can and do involve conflict between the police and people with a sincere (even if misplaced) belief in the rightness of their cause. More problematic is Waddington's assertion that there is

mestic missionary', in *Journal of Social History*, 9, 1976 but see also Tony BUNYAN, *The History and Practice of the Political Police in Britain*, London, Quartet Books, 1977 and, somewhat later, Phil SCRATON, *The State of the Police*, London, Pluto Press, 1985.

⁶ P. WADDINGTON, 'Public order policing: citizenship and moral ambiguity' in F. LEISHMAN, *et al.*, (eds.) *Core Issues in Policing*, London, Longman, 1996, p.117.



a fundamental distinction between crime fighting and order maintenance. The former is rarely morally questionable but the latter is almost invariably morally ambiguous⁷.

Precisely for the reasons that he gives regarding public order policing, i.e. that the law can be unjust or uphold injustice, crime fighting can also be morally ambiguous. One need only consider the attempts to control via criminalisation leisure, and especially sexual, activities to see how crime fighting could be and was seen as a morally ambiguous activity. It is a misleading simplification to suggest that there is a distinct and morally (or politically) unambiguous set of actions that can be labelled "crime".

Nor, contrary to legitimizing rhetoric, can it be assumed that the law is enforced equally and impartiality across society. In the same way that the law is suffused with political and moral values, so the enforcement of the law by the police is also distorted by a variety of subjective factors, as Stephen Box, among others, has eloquently argued⁸. For very good practical reasons, police resources have to be concentrated in specific areas -quite simply, there are not (and never have been) enough policemen to patrol all areas. The decision to patrol one area rather than another will reflect certain assumptions about a district and its inhabitants however much the decision may be justified in terms of "experience" and "objective" information. Twentieth-century sociological studies as much as historical analyses have revealed the extent to which the police categorize the public. Cain summarizes the situation neatly.

...policemen tend to divide society into the police and the rest. And the public, too, was broadly sub-divided into the 'rough' and the 'respectable', and within these categories by race and sex⁹.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.117.

⁸ S BOX, *Deviance, Reality & Society*, London, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981, especially chapter 6.

⁹ M. E. CAIN, *Society and the Policeman's Role*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973. See also C. DUNHILL (ed.), *The Boys in Blue: Women's Challenge to the Police*, London, Virago, 1989; Ellis CASHMORE & Eugene MCLAUGHLIN, *Out of Control: Policing Black People*, London, Routledge,



Given these categories and the assumption - often presented as hard "knowledge" - that certain districts and certain people are criminally inclined, it is not surprising to find that policing falls more heavily upon certain sections of society. To take but one obvious example, as official statistics make abundantly clear, a black working-class youth is significantly more likely to be stopped and questioned by the police than his white suburban counterpart. Such conditions are unlikely to breed respect and are more likely to engender hatred of and violence towards the police.

Furthermore, the identification of "rough" elements in society, groups seen as threatening to the "respectable", carries with it the potential for police violence as Cain, once again, notes:

[T]hese people [i.e. "roughs"] were seen as a separate category. They had to be spoken to 'in their own language' which meant starting a conversation with such remarks as 'look here, mate', swearing and perhaps using physical violence¹⁰.

Perceived threats to society (gypsies, the Irish, Afro-Caribbeans, gays and lesbians etc.) are seen to need (and deserve) different treatment precisely because of their perceived alien nature. It is no coincidence that such "outcast" groups were and are described in terms that are derogatory at best and de-humanizing at worst. Britain in the 1980s witnessed a renewal of interest in the threat from within with certain groups, notably trade unionists and urban working-class youths, being described as "enemies within". This situation was further compounded by long-established police tactics for tackling individuals and particularly for dealing with crowds. As Waddington notes, 'despite its dubious legality [the baton charge] has compelling tactical appeal' but in itself gives encouragement to indiscipline¹¹.

It is, therefore, not unreasonable to argue that, particularly in a society characterized by marked inequalities in power and wealth, the enforcement of the law carries with it a very high likelihood of vio-

1991, and Roger GRAEF, *Talking Blues: The Police in their Own Words*, London, Fontana, 1989.

¹⁰ M. E. CAIN, *op. cit.*, p.115.

¹¹ P. WADDINGTON, *op. cit.*, p.125.



lence between police and policed with each being both perpetrator and victim. Nineteenth-century England undoubtedly saw marked inequalities in the distribution of wealth, though these may have diminished somewhat over the period, while late-twentieth century England has seen a widening of the gap between rich and poor which stands in marked contrast to the long-term trend of this century. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that policing and violence were commonly found together.

I

The history of policing in the nineteenth century, in town and countryside alike, is punctuated by often spectacular incidents of communal violence directed against the police. In extreme cases, such as the celebrated case of Colne in 1840, the police could be driven from town (on more than one occasion) by concerted action by the inhabitants¹². But this was exceptional. Consider, rather, the following incidents of collective anti-police violence:

(a) In late September 1843 two bricklayers' labourers were charged at Clerkenwell [London] with the brutal assault of a police constable. According to the newspaper report, following an attempt to disperse 'an immense mob' of Irish men and women, a police constable was assaulted and an arrest attempted

upon which a general rush was made by the mob on the two constables, and in the scuffle the man [who had been arrested] was rescued. [PC Marsh] seeing that [PC Lawrence] was knocked down, and on rising from the ground blood was pouring in a stream from his head, endeavoured to make his way through the crowd to his assistance, but he was hustled and surrounded. He, however, did manage to get to the side of Lawrence, and the latter then told him that he had been wounded on the back of the head with a large stone, and pointed out the prisoner Harris as the man he had seen pick up and throw the stone at him. He thereupon seized this man, as did also the other constable Lawrence, but the prisoner resisted most violently, striking and kicking them several times, in which brutality he was actively aided by his companions. Another constable having come up, they succeeded in dragging their prisoner through the crowd...There was a

¹² D. TAYLOR, *op. cit.*, p. 109.



large wound on the back of the head [of PC Lawrence], in fact a hole at least an inch and a half deep...The surgeon pronounced the skull was fractured...A change for the worse had taken place in the afternoon and the constable now lay in a most precarious state at the station house, for he was not in a fit condition to be removed to the hospital¹³.

(b) In January 1865 two serious incidents took place in Middlesbrough. PC Stainsby attempted to arrest a labourer, Michael Lougheran but

the prisoner commenced kicking the officer and striking him, [another] four or five men came up and assisted him in committing a most brutal assault. The officer was knocked down and the men attacked him in the most savage manner, kicking him with their feet, striking him with sticks which they carried on them and biting him. Two severe wounds were inflicted on the top of his head and the officer was rendered well-nigh insensible¹⁴.

PC Wilkinson, attempting to arrest 'an Emeraldler', Patrick Evans, faced an even greater threat.

The officer then took [Evans] into custody, when the prisoner called upon the crowd to liberate him. several of his comrades and the prisoner commenced to beat and kick the officer who was presently surrounded by a crowd of 500 to 600 people¹⁵.

(c) In August 1884 the attempted arrest, for drunk and disorderly behaviour, of Bridget Regan in Willenhall Road, Wolverhampton, led to an incident in which two constables were unable to take their prisoner into custody 'owing to the obstruction of some 1500 people who had by then collected'. The following transpired:

A number of men hustled and struck at the officers and finally dragged them into a house [a little before midnight]. They kept them there some time and it was 12.20 p.m. before the officers could get away with the prisoner in their custody. Both officers were maltreated

¹³ *The News of the World*, 1 October 1843.

¹⁴ *Middlesbrough Weekly News*, 6 January 1865.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*



by the mob and the language towards them was of the most gross and indecent character¹⁶.

(d) On November 1888 the villagers of Stebbing, Essex, celebrated Guy Fawkes' Day

by making an effigy of a gentleman in Her Majesty's employment who has rendered himself unpopular by doing his duty. The effigy of PC Enoch Raison was borne through the village in the afternoon and again at night in a torchlight procession before being hanged and burned at Bran End¹⁷.

The unfortunate Raison was driven out of the village, showered with missiles and subjected to hoots of derision.

(e) During the 1911 transport strike in Liverpool the following scenes ensued:

The police reserves were called out and began to clear the streets, and the crowd retaliating, made desperate attacks, throwing stones and bottles at the police. Hand to hand fighting followed. One party of 15 policemen was surrounded and... the officers were attacked with their own batons, the officer in charge being dangerously wounded... Christian-street is in a poor and rough neighbourhood, and the residents in many instances took sides with the rioters against the police, throwing bottles, bricks, slates and stones from the houses and from the roofs¹⁸.

These incidents should not be seen as daily occurrences: large-scale anti-police violence was the exception rather than the rule, even in turbulent places such as Liverpool, London, Middlesbrough and Wolverhampton. However, on occasions large numbers of men and women were prepared to take strong action against the duly-appointed servants of the state, i.e. the police. Incidents such as these

¹⁶ *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, August 20, 1884 cited in D. WOODS, 'Community Violence' in J. BENSON (ed.), *The Working Class in England, 1875-1914*, Beckenham, Croom Helm, 1985, p.182.

¹⁷ *Essex Weekly News*, 9 November 1888 cited in M. SCOLLAN, *Sworn to serve: Police in Essex*, Chichester, Phillimore, 1993, p.43.

¹⁸ *The Times*, 14 August 1911, pp.6 & 7.



were characterised by an absence of consent, outright hostility to various aspects of police duty and, clearly, widespread, if generally short-lived, violence. From the introduction of the new police to the outbreak of the Great War (and beyond) incidents such as these were a recurring feature. Groups of men and women, overwhelmingly working-class, periodically attacked policemen in London, in provincial cities, in industrial towns and in countryside villages. In extremis, policemen were killed. Middlesbrough provides a stark example. On Christmas Eve, 1919, Inspector Burney and PC Bainbridge came off duty to be met by a 'drunken mob'. Bainbridge suffered injuries which forced him to retire from the force while the unfortunate Burney was kicked to death. The incident, however, was a case of mistaken identity. The red-haired Burney had been mistaken for the much-hated Inspector Sowerby who had built up a reputation for aggressiveness in a career that had spanned several years.

Such incidents were but the visible tip of a much larger pyramid of, at best, begrudging acceptance, at worst, suspicion and outright hostility which characterised popular attitudes towards the police. In addition to such acts of collective violence there were numerous cases of individual assaults upon officers of the law. A perusal of the records of any police force in the country quickly reveals a lengthy list of constables whose injuries necessitated time off work, at best, and retirement from the force, at worst. While it is true that the number of assaults on policemen recorded in the official crime statistics dropped steadily in the last third of the nineteenth century, the situation on the ground was not necessarily so comforting for the individual constable. In early twentieth century London the official records show that one in four constables could expect to be assaulted each year. The notorious Campbell Bunk in Islington, north London, was still known as 'Kill Copper Row' while, more generally, the cries of 'Give it to the copper!' and 'Boot 'em!' remained common on the streets of Victorian and Edwardian London. In provincial England the picture was not greatly dissimilar. Thomas Smethurst, a policeman in Bolton and later in Stalybridge from the late 1880s to the 1920s, faced a variety of dangers, including beatings and kickings to various parts of the anatomy, often inflicted by drunken men and women, during routine policing. Police constable Bate of the Middlesbrough force was off work for several months as the result of an assault in



which he had been 'viciously kicked in the stomach' by a local resident, Annie Lee. Even in rural Dorset policing was accompanied by violence on numerous occasions, as police constable Hann found to his cost. Motives were not always clear, especially where drunks were concerned, but in many instances there could be little doubt that behaviour that was overtly directed against unpopular policemen and unpopular policework¹⁹.

This evidence, it must be noted, is but one side of the picture. There is also clear evidence of pro-police sentiments (albeit grudging at times) among working-class people. Indeed, there were times when there were very public displays of gratitude for the actions and grief for the passing of certain policemen. Much of this was a result of concerted and sustained efforts by various police forces throughout the country to build up an image of public service that went beyond the narrow confines of crime control. However, it remains the case that there was also widespread mistrust of the police within working-class communities which could easily turn to violence - and not all of this could be dismissed as the actions of criminals or drunks. The question arises: why did hostility linger? The answer is to be found in popular perceptions of the police as outsiders, imposing alien values at the behest of others in society, and often in an officious manner, or worse.

The policeman lived in but was not of the community. Flora Thompson, hardly noted as a critic of the police, wrote about her experience of late-nineteenth century Oxford village life. The constable in Candleford Green

was a kindly and good-tempered man; yet nobody seemed to like him, and he and his wife led a somewhat isolated life, in the village, but not entirely of the village. Law-abiding as most country people were in those day, and few as were those who had any personal reason for fearing the police, the village constable was still regarded as a potential enemy, set to spy upon them by the authorities²⁰.

¹⁹ D. TAYLOR, *op. cit.*, chapter 4.

²⁰ Flora THOMPSON, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, London, Penguin, 1973, p.484.



Billy Dixon, a labourer interviewed by Alun Howkins, was more terse. 'Course the police were against the people then in them days...the police was sort of a bit of an enemy'²¹. The notion of the policeman as a foreign spy was closely related to the widespread belief that he was an agent of regulation, imposing bourgeois values that restricted both the work and leisure habits of the masses. Writing just before the Great War, Stephen Reynolds and his co-authors the Woolley brothers commented that the police

are charged, not only with the prevention and detection of crime among them, as among other people, but with the enforcement of a whole mass of petty enactments, which are little more than social regulations bearing almost entirely on working-class life. At the bidding of one class, they attempt to impose a certain social discipline on another... there is hardly a man who cannot, from the working-class point of view, bring up instances of gross injustice on the part of the police towards himself or his friends or relations - to say nothing of cases that are plainly unjust from any point of view²².

To understand these perceptions of the police it is necessary to look more closely at the nature of police work as it evolved during the nineteenth century. It is well known that the founding fathers of the Metropolitan police, Rowan and Mayne, stated unequivocally in the General Instructions, issued to all Metropolitan policemen, that 'the principle object to be attained is the Prevention of Crime [and] and to this great end every effort of the Police is to be directed'²³. However, and this is often overlooked, Rowan and Mayne saw crime prevention as a means to an end. From it would follow, not simply, 'the security of the person and property' but also 'the preservation of the public tranquillity, and all the other objects of a Police Establishment'²⁴. While security of person and property might have been relatively easy to determine, the preservation of public tranquillity was a phrase that did not lend itself to easy definition. What constituted a threat to

²¹ Alun HOWKINS, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk, 1870-1923*, London, Macmillan, 1986, p.239.

²² S. REYNOLDS and B. & T. WOOLLEY, *Seem so! A Working-class View of Politics*, London, Macmillan, 1911, pp.86-87.

²³ Cited in C. REITH, *op. cit.*, p.135.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p.136.



public tranquillity? Was it a mob bent on pillage, a group of angry strikers on a picket line, a meeting of political radicals, an unlicensed fair, a penny-gaff, a Salvation Army band, street-traders shouting their wares, a group of animated young men outside a public house, or a group of children throwing snowballs or rolling hoops in the street? The answer, of course, is that all of these could be and indeed were seen as threats to public tranquillity and as such occasioned police action. Unsurprisingly, police interventions in such matters carried a high risk of conflict as war was waged not solely upon crime but also on the customs and cultures of predominantly working-class people.

From the outset it is clear that the new police were expected to do more than fight crime in the conventionally understood sense. Policing was about bringing order and decorum to the streets and lanes of England. For example, the Birmingham police, in 1839, were told to arrest people for betting or gambling in the street, begging, wandering abroad with no visible means of subsistence as well as for exposing obscene prints, indecent behaviour and prostitution²⁵. The newly-formed police in Rochdale, Lancashire, were similarly used to drive peddlers and street sellers from the town's streets. Similarly, working women (street prostitutes) along with beggars, gamblers and those simply wandering with no visible means of support were liable to arrest by the new police as they waged a campaign on behalf of moral reformers while the police superintendent of King's Lynn, in 1836, was given clear instructions to keep public houses under surveillance and suppress vagrancy. These were not isolated occurrences. Throughout the country policemen were required to enforce local by-laws which regulated conduct in the streets and public spaces and included such activities as singing, shaking rugs and carpets as well as the flying of kites and the bowling of hoops. As a consequence, those people who used the streets and lanes for leisure or work found themselves the objects of police action. Street traders and itinerant hawkers found their livelihoods threatened as traditional ways of vending were disrupted by "move on" tactics. It is no coincidence, for example, that Henry Mayhew found no love for the police among the London costermongers he interviewed. "Can you wonder

²⁵ For the full text see D. TAYLOR, *op. cit.*, p.154-155.



at it, sir," said a costermonger to me, "that I hate the police? They drive us about, we must move on, we can't stand here, and we can't pitch there." As Mayhew informed his readers: 'To serve out a policeman is the bravest act by which a costermonger can distinguish himself.' And distinguish themselves they did, building up a reputation for the viciousness of their assaults on the police. There was undisguised delight expressed by one coster lad interviewed by Mayhew as he recounted how he had taken his revenge by inflicting a savage kicking on a constable. A sentence of twelve months' imprisonment did nothing to undermine the pleasure²⁶.

Attempts to stamp out traditional leisure activities were a major source of conflict. Superintendent Heaton's "Huddersfield Campaign" in the mid-nineteenth century resulted in a sustained attempt to restrict drinking by the close supervision of public ale and beer houses, to eradicate traditional sports such as cockfighting, dogfighting and prize fighting, and to protect the Sabbath by unearthing and applying ancient laws. It has to be noted that Heaton's success was limited. The assault on the beer houses and brothels in one of the main streets of the town led to the arrest and conviction of John Sutcliffe, the self-styled "King of Castlegate", but an attempt to prosecute three men for continuing to watch a cricket match on Sunday when ordered by police to attend church failed. More ignominiously, a concerted action to drive Guy Fawkes' celebrators from the market square in Huddersfield in 1848, using a combination of "move on" tactics and fire hoses, was totally counterproductive when the hoses were turned on the Superintendent of Police who was left humiliated, on all fours in the mud²⁷. Huddersfield was not unique in this respect. The newly-formed Staffordshire County Police Force was used to crack down on wakes and fairs as well as on animal baiting and various forms of fighting. The unpopularity of the police, particularly at prize fights, was such that there was an increase in minor riots in the mid-1840s as constables were assaulted and

²⁶ H. MAYHEW, *London Labour and London Poor*, London, Penguin, 1985, pp.15, 23-28; P. QUENNELL (ed.), *Mayhew's London*, London, Spring Books, 1969, p.56.

²⁷ R. STORCH, 'The policeman as domestic missionary', *Social History*, 9, 1976, pp.484-485, 490.



prisoners rescued. Two decades later in Oldham there were similar anti-police disturbances.

The range of police responsibilities was increased significantly during the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. Once again, their new activities brought them into conflict with certain groups in society as they checked and acted against people who were unlicensed hawkers, pedlars, porters, old-metal dealers and child street traders. At various times, and in various parts of the country, there were purges against prostitution, drinking and gambling which fell disproportionately on working-class, rather than upper-class, providers and customers²⁸. The extension of police powers through legislative change should not be underestimated. Provincial police, for example, had wide powers to stop and search on suspicion following the 1862 Night Poaching Act while the 1879 Summary Jurisdiction Act outlined 'a nation-wide and systematised police procedure in the disciplining of social life'²⁹. The serving of warrants for distress, the whipping of juveniles and general involvement in a whole gamut of activities, from watching and apprehension through to trial and punishment, fundamentally changed the relationship between police and public. In addition, as police forces grew in size and became more efficient their impact on the policed became greater, though this may have been partly offset over time by growing familiarity between street traders and the police.

The bitterest and most publicised expressions of anger were associated with and caused by incidents in which the police were unequivocally identified with political and/or economic "haves" against "have nots". The nineteenth-century political elites felt themselves to be threatened by those who did not have the vote and used

²⁸ The situation in London is well covered by S. PETROW, *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870-1914*, Oxford University Press, 1994, but similar campaigns were to be seen in large cities such as Birmingham, Leeds and Liverpool, county towns such as York, industrial towns such as Huddersfield and Middlesbrough as well as in market towns like Kings Lynn.

²⁹ C. STEEDMAN, *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, p.159.



the police to contain what they saw as the irresponsible mob which threatened the political status quo. Disillusionment with the so-called Great Reform Act of 1832 led to protest meetings, one of which, that at Cold Bath Fields in 1833, resulted in the death through stabbing of a police constable. Other disturbances in London took place in the 1840s and 1860s as political protesters took to the streets in large numbers while in the early twentieth century suffragette anger was vented on the Metropolitan police on more than one occasion. Likewise, protests by the unemployed, as in Trafalgar Square in 1887, for example, gave rise to bloody conflict.

Equally, if not more, explosive were industrial protests. Once again, the position of the police was all too clear, though rarely as blatant as in Ashton, Lancashire, when, during the cotton famine, a local mill-owner, Hugh Mason, was carried on the shoulders of two policemen as a warning to strikers³⁰. The same county saw a number of riots involving attacks on the police in such towns as Accrington, Blackburn, Burnley and Preston during the bitter nine-week strike of 1878. In a manner reminiscent of earlier events at Colne, there was a collapse of law and order in Darwen that lasted for several days. At its worst on May 10th. 1878 police reinforcements, who had been brought in from Blackburn, Bolton, Burnley, Clitheroe and Manchester, were attacked by a crowd, estimated to be in excess of 2000 people, which went on to lay siege to the police station. Among the police casualties was the deputy Chief Constable of Lancashire who was laid low by a missile during what was effectively guerrilla warfare between strikers and police. Similar troubles flared up later in the century. In 1881, for example, the Lancashire police, armed with cutlasses, fought striking miners in what became known as the Battle of Howe Bridge³¹. Likewise, industrial disputes in early twentieth

³⁰ Bob DOBSON, *Policing Lancashire*, pp.28 & 31. Similarly, Richard JERVIS, recounting his experience of policing a strike in another Lancashire town, Bolton, noted the 'generous manner in which they [the police] were treated by the Town Council and the foundry masters by whose works they were posted.' R. JERVIS, *Chronicles of a Victorian Detective*, first published 1907, reprinted (Runcorn, P & D Riley, 1995), p.60.

³¹ J. E. KING, "'We could eat the police!': popular violence in the north Lancashire cotton strike of 1878", in *Victorian studies*, 28, 1985. Bob DOBSON, *op. cit.*, p.41. It should be noted that not all strikes gave rise to



century South Wales were accompanied by strong anti-police sentiment as were the transport strikes of 1911 in many towns and cities.

In August 1911 'sharp conflicts with the police' were reported during the London dock strike while during the rail dispute a crowd of over 500 men attacked police guarding the Midlands good station at Kentish Town³². In other parts of the country there were ugly scenes. Police and porters were besieged by an angry crowd in Chesterfield during the rail dispute while at the Waterloo Main colliery, Leeds

a large detachment of police, [guarding] the manager's house and the colliery railway line...quickly came into conflict with a mob of 500 persons, who were throwing stones and other missiles when the police advanced towards them³³.

However, the worst incidents took place in Liverpool and reveal both extensive striker hostility to the police and active public support for strikers in the battles with the police. On the 14 August a crowd 'made desperate attacks, throwing stones and bottles at the police. Hand to hand fighting followed.' Fifteen policemen were isolated and robbed of their batons which were then used to beat them. In one part of the city, described as 'a poor and rough neighbourhood' many of the residents joined the strikers 'against the police, throwing bottles, bricks, slates and stones from the houses and roofs.' The situation in the Scotland-road district was described as 'guerrilla warfare' which barricades and barbed-wire entanglements being used to keep out the police³⁴.

The full extent of anti-police violence will never be known, though much remains to be discovered in the pages of the provincial press and the records of individual police forces. Nonetheless, it is evident that Whiggish police histories have greatly understated the

violence and in certain cases, notably the miners' strike of 1893 in Leigh, the actions of the local police in providing soup kitchens was widely appreciated.

³² *The Times*, 11 and 22 August 1911.

³³ *The Times*, 21 September 1991.

³⁴ *The Times*, 14 and 16 August 1911.



extent and persistence of animosity towards the police. The majority of middle-class men and women may well have enjoyed cordial, if condescending, relations with the police -at least until they took to their cars and then fell foul of the boys in blue- the same cannot be said of the working classes for whom relations with the police were far more complex and problematic. Working-class responses to the police cannot be simply summarised. Positive responses to the crime-fighting, welfare and emergency work that the police carried out co-existed with negative responses to the enforcement of petty and moralistic restrictions on work and leisure, let alone to the restrictions on political and industrial activities. Nor did such contradictory responses correspond neatly to a division between rough and respectable. Not only were contradictory responses found across the spectrum of working-class society, they were also found within an individual. The respectable artisan, who applauded the police for arresting housebreakers and petty thieves or for their courage in an emergency, could just as easily condemn them for denying his right to demand political reform or for protecting blackleg labour during a strike.

Hostility leading to violence was as much a part of Edwardian as early-Victorian day-to-day life. That said, the extent of outright mass hostility to the police *per se* did decline over time. Events such as those in Colne in 1840 were very much the product of the early days during which the new police were being introduced into communities for the first time. Nonetheless, as the 1878 events in Darwen show, the potential for a repetition remained. Despite the increase in numbers during the second half of the nineteenth century, there were too few policemen to retain control of the streets by force of numbers alone and in times of heightened stress and social conflict they could lose control, albeit on a temporary basis. It is also likely that the number of individual acts of violence against the police declined over time, though the official statistics of assaults on police officers have to be treated with caution, not least because of changing police attitudes towards prosecution. Although there was a general decline in the incidence of inter-personal violence, assaults upon the police remained a regular feature of life in Edwardian England, notwithstanding the *modus vivendi* that had developed between police and the policed in the years since their introduction.



II

The creation of professional police forces was part of a wider process of state formation in which the state, increasing its power locally as much as nationally, sought to monopolize legitimate force in society. Successful policing was, nonetheless, dependent upon a significant degree of popular acquiescence and required, at times, the use of force. From the outset a contrast was drawn between the new police and the armed forces and the rhetoric of the former was couched in terms of minimal force. This concept, superficially attractive, proved to be an elusive one, not least because of conflicting and changing notions of what constituted acceptable force in society at large. Determining the degree of force to be used in a variety of often highly charged situations was a major operational problem for police officers but also provoked wider debate which could easily lead to the emotive charge of "police violence". Whig interpretations of the police have emphasized the development of policing by consent but revisionists have quoted with approval Engels' reference to the 'wonderfully soothing power' that the policeman's truncheon had for the English bourgeoisie³⁵. However, the extent to which the policeman's truncheon was put to use - let alone the extent to which such usage soothed the worried minds of the English bourgeoisie - is not easy to establish from the historical record.

Unlike the regular army or the yeomanry, the new police were, as a deliberate act of policy by Sir Robert Peel, presented as a distinctive, non-militaristic force. Although uniformed they were unarmed, at least in the sense that they did not carry routinely killing instruments such as cutlasses or muskets. Nonetheless, the police truncheon, intended to disable rather than kill, was still a formidable weapon in the hand of men chosen in large measure for their physical attributes. Even more formidable was the use of truncheon-carrying policemen - the baton charge - which was an early-formulated police tactic to deal with crowd disturbances. The earliest police tactics for

³⁵ The quotation is used, for example, at the beginning of R. STORCH, 'The Plague of Blue Locusts: police reform and popular resistance in northern England, 1840-57', in *International Review of Social History*, 20, 1975.



crowd control were essentially reactive in that constables stood their ground and only hit back with their batons after they had been attacked. Dissatisfaction with this situation was not confined to the police. Francis Place advised a senior officer, Inspector Thomas, that the police should act quickly to 'thrash those who composed the mob with their staves as long as any of them remained together, but to take none into custody; and that if this were done once or twice, there would be no more such mobs'³⁶. The new proactive tactics were used on a mob responsible for disturbances during the Lord mayor's show in 1830 and again at Cold Bath Fields in 1833 but Place's optimistic assessment that there would be no more mobs proved unfounded. The baton charge required considerable control on the part of officers and men involved and, not only in the early days when forces were most inexperienced, carried with it a high risk of indisciplined action. The potential for violence was further increased by psychological considerations which have not always been made fully explicit by historians in the treatment of police violence³⁷. Policing, as recent studies have demonstrated, is not a neutral activity but is conditioned by perceptions of the nature of particular groups and the threat they supposedly pose to society. Those perceived as "threatening others" are seen to require closer scrutiny than other sections of society and, because of their perceived threat to law-abiding society to have forfeited certain rights that others enjoy. Policemen in the nineteenth as much as the twentieth century shared many of the wider prejudices against the Irish, gypsies and other travelling people, as well as against a variety of political and industrial "agitators"³⁸. Indeed, in

³⁶ G. WALLAS, *The Life of Francis Place, 1771-1854*, London, Hutchinson, 1918, p.248.

³⁷ See for example the absence of any discussion of psychological factors contributing to police violence in the otherwise excellent (and pioneering) study by C. EMSLEY, "'The Thump of Wood on a Swede Turnip': Police Violence in Nineteenth-Century England", in *Criminal Justice History*, 6, 1985.

³⁸ At its worst, for example, in early-twentieth century south Wales the Chief Constable of Glamorgan, Captain Lionel Lindsay, viewed striking trade unionists as little better than socialist subversives who should be behind bars. He fought this particular conflict both before and after the Great War. J. MORGAN, *Conflict and Order: the Police and Labour Disputes in England and Wales, 1900-1939*, Oxford University Press, 1989 and B. WEIN-



some parts of the country senior officers had a deep mistrust of the poor in general. In 1904, for example, a confidential report sent to Scotland Yard by divisional inspectors and superintendents of the Metropolitan Police dismissed 'so-called unemployed' as 'habitual loafers' while their 'poor and distressed appearance' was explained in terms of their 'thriftlessness and intemperate habits' rather than to 'absolute poverty'.³⁹

The combination of physical potential and psychological predisposition gave rise to a number well-known incidents of police violence, several of which took place in London. The radical political meeting called at Cold Bath Fields in 1833 is best known for the stabbing to death of PC Culley but there were also a series of incidents of police violence which angered contemporary observers. John Hudson, a hairdresser, gave evidence of an assault on a woman in which 'three of the policemen came by the door, No. 11, where she stood along with me, and struck her in the face, and felled her to the floor, and her face bled...', while Samuel Newton, a solicitors clerk, described how he saw a man who 'cried for mercy, and there were about eight or ten of them [policemen], and they appeared actually to be striking at him, evidently with the desire of bringing him to the ground'⁴⁰. Police action in 1848 when dispersing a Chartist meeting was condemned by no less a person than the Home Secretary who spoke of 'an indiscriminate, wanton, unhuman and brutal attack' in which houses were broken into and women and children assaulted in and around the scene of the meeting⁴¹. Accusations of police violence were made again, less than ten years later, following the 1855 Sunday trading riots in Hyde Park. The 'brutal and violent conduct of the police in truncheoning' innocent bystanders was condemned in parliament by Thomas Duncombe. The subsequent inquiry heard evidence that

BERGER, *Keeping the Peace? Policing strikes in Britain*, Oxford, Berg, 1991.

³⁹ V. A. C. GATRELL, 'Crime, authority and the policeman state' in F. M. L. THOMPSON (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, vol. 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.276.

⁴⁰ Report and minutes of evidence of the Select Committee on Cold Bath Fields Meeting, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1833 (718), xiii, QQ.736 and 1086.

⁴¹ Cited in D. GOODWAY, *London Chartism, 1833-1848*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.120.



substantiated these claims. In particular, the actions of Superintendent Hughes, who had made extensive use of his horsewhip before ordering his men to use their staves, were condemned in the official report. This resort to violence was described as 'not warranted' for the following reasons:

No attack had been made by the people, no combined or serious resistance had been made to the police...and considering how many inoffensive individuals were mixed up with the disorderly portion of the crowd, the execution of such orders would almost of necessity be dangerous, and attended with unjustifiable violence⁴².

Political meetings in the mid-1860s led to clashes. In 1864 the Commissioner of Police, Sir Richard Mayne, condemned Superintendent Loxton for the use of unwarranted force in dispersing a Garibaldi meeting while in 1866 Mayne himself was condemned as 'the leader of an organised gang of ruffians...' following the dispersal of a political rally⁴³. To make matters worse Mayne had been injured, hit by a flying stone, in the action to disperse the crowd. *The Times* noted extensive hostility towards the police who were seen to have 'no feeling for the working man' but popular support for the soldiers who were called in to control the crowd after the failure of the Metropolitan police⁴⁴. Similar troubles resurfaced some twenty years later in 1887. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner Warren banned a meeting called for 13 November in Trafalgar Square by the Metropolitan Radical Association in protest against high levels of unemployment. Some 2000 police were moved into Trafalgar Square and

⁴² *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd. series, 139, 1855, cols. 453-4. Minutes of evidence of the report of Her Majesty's Commissioners on the Alleged Disturbances of the Public Peace in Hyde Park on Sunday July 1st., 1855, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1856, (2016), xxiii, p.xi and also QQ.825-9, 6084 and 6101 in which witnesses describe being beaten by the police or seeing others, including a boy and an old man, being hit.

⁴³ *Fun* 4 August 1866 cited in C. EMSLEY, *The English Police: a political and social history*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p.163.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 25 July 1866. One correspondent was told by a labourer at the scene that the soldiers were 'poor devils, hard up; they haven't a shilling to bless themselves with.' Others in the crowd made a pre-Blairite reference to 'the people's Guards'.



additional police were positioned to cut off entries to the square. The procession from Clerkenwell, led by Annie Besant and George Bernard Shaw was described by *The Times* as 'rather exultant' but there was no indication of trouble until it turned towards Trafalgar Square,

But at this point matters took a serious . The police, mounted and on foot, charged in among the people, striking indiscriminately in all directions...The blood in most instances was freely flowing...and the spectacle was indeed a sickening one⁴⁵.

Similar incidents happened at Haymarket and on Westminster Bridge. Over 400 people were arrested and there were some 200 casualties and three fatalities.

Women as well as men were the victims of police violence. The suffragette demonstration of November 1910 provides graphic evidence. One participant described the events as follows:

While we were still two yards away they [the police] rushed at us. I was pushed, grasped by the back of the neck, and propelled forward with a great force. This was followed by an almost stunning blow on the base of the neck, which sent me to my knees....[A] policemen took hold of my motor veil and twisted it round, trying to strangle me. When arrested an officious person in plain clothes held me by the muscles of the upper arm, which he twisted and pinched.

There were also allegations of sexual harassment. As another woman complained:

Several times constables and plain-clothes men who were in the crowds passed their arms around me from the back and clutched hold of my breasts in as public a manner as possible, and men in the crowd followed their example. I was also pummelled on the chest, and my breast was clutched by a constable from the front...My skirt was lifted as high as possible, and the constable attempted to lift me off the ground by raising his knee. This he could not do, so he threw me on the ground and incited the men to treat me as they wished. Conse-

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 14 November 1887.



quently, several men who, I believe, were policemen in also endeavoured to lift my dress⁴⁶.

This was the most notorious incident of police brutality and it provoked condemnation not only from sympathisers such as Henry Nevinson, who described the action of the police as 'violent and savage', but also from more neutral figures such as C. Mansell-Moulton, the vice-president of the Royal College of Surgeons, who spoke of the women having been treated with 'the greatest brutality'⁴⁷. However, it was not an isolated incident. Leading suffragettes noted numerous incidents in which individual policemen dragged women protesters into police stations and in which bodies of policemen, included mounted as well as on foot, broke up crowds with scant regard for safety. On 13 February 1907, for example, Emmeline Pankhurst described scenes of 'brutality and ruthlessness' as mounted policemen 'rode directly into the procession, scattering the women right and left.' Describing the events of 21 November 1911, Henry Nevinson noted how a crowd of women was 'constantly ridden down and broken up by the mounted police'⁴⁸.

Public order policing gave rise to problems in other parts of the country. The miners' strike in south Wales saw accusations from local tradesmen and clerics of indiscriminate baton charges and other police brutalities while the 1911 transport strikes saw two fatalities and several casualties in the infamous 'Bloody Sunday' disturbances in Liverpool. The Central News Agency report of August 14, 1911 referred to 'vigorous onslaughts' by the police which gave rise to 'many complaints that no discretion was exercised...' Mr. Seddon, an ex-Labour M.P., was outspoken in his condemnation of the most 'unprovoked and brutal attack' by the police that he had witnessed in fifteen years. Euphemistic references in the press to 'the mounted police [having] an opportunity of enforcing a lesson' and to the 'deep impression' made by police 'vigour with the baton at close quarters'

⁴⁶ *Treatment of the women's deputation by the Police*, London, Woman's Press, 1910, pp.7, 11-12.

⁴⁷ *Daily Mirror*, 22 November 1910.

⁴⁸ Cited in *Shoulder to Shoulder* (...), p.? Nevinson however thought the behaviour of the police had improved in comparison with the previous year!



add further weight to the argument⁴⁹. A graphic 'view from below' of the actions of the police during a strike in Manchester, which further supports this interpretation, has been given by Robert Roberts:

Strike breakers, shielded by the police, attempted to move coal and food. Pickets determined to stop them. In a dozen places fierce fighting broke out and lasted all day. Five hundred policemen from other towns poured in at once... Men rushed yelling and cursing into the alleyways. A score ran towards us, clogs clattering over the setts, pursued by a mounted police. A child, terrified standing by the door, I saw an officer lean forward on his horse and hit a neighbour with his truncheon above the eyes, heard the blow like the thump of wood on a swede turnip. The man ran crouching, hands to his face, into a wall and collapsed⁵⁰.

Incidents such as these made a lasting impression but were not the most common form of police violence. Policing, for the most part, was routine and mundane but there was still a role for firm action that easily spilled over into violence. In the light of Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards chastisement, the use of a rolled police cape to cuff the ears of a young miscreant was probably not seen as unduly violent. Nonetheless, the psychological impact could be as important as the physical. Roberts, again, captures this well in his description of Salford police breaking up a group of youngsters, including some 'gambling for halfpences':

From nowhere gallop a couple of 'rozzers', cuffing, hacking, punching, sweeping youngsters into the wall with a swing of heavy folded capes...Breathing heavily the Law retires bearing off a 'hooligan' or two to be made an example of. The club is over for another night, leaving its young members with a fear and hatred of the police that in some perfectly law-abiding citizens lasted through life and helped colour the attitude of a whole working-class generation to civil authority⁵¹.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 12, 14 and 19 August 1911.

⁵⁰ R. ROBERTS, *The Classic Slum: Salford life in the first quarter of the century*, London, Penguin, 1971, pp.93-94.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p.162.



The use of a truncheon was a different matter. As a disabling weapon it was capable of causing severe injuries even when used in self-defence. Self-defence was, undoubtedly, necessary given the prevalence of attacks by hostile individuals or gangs. However, the pages of the local press and court records reveal that truncheons were used with less restraint on occasions. Severe injuries, even deaths, resulted, though the precise numbers will never be known. Exceptionally, policemen found themselves charged with manslaughter or various forms of assault as a result of their over-zealous use of the truncheon. Probably more common was the use of the fist to quell the resistance of a prisoner or to teach a lesson to a suspected offender. Tantalizing snippets of evidence survive. Newspaper references to police 'bullies' treating working-class suspects in a 'brutish manner', conflicting accounts of events given in court, oral histories, and oblique references to what later would be known as getting one's revenge in first suggest that physical assaults on prisoners and/or suspects was part and parcel of police practise in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As *The Spectator* commented of the capital, but in a judgement that has wider applicability, 'there are few residents in London who have not at some time or other observed instances of oppression and brutality perpetrated by a policeman against the poor...'⁵²

Assessing the extent of violence associated with public-order and routine policing is more difficult than assessing the extent of anti-police violence. Notions of minimal force are extremely difficult to establish and quantify while the evidence is fragmentary and not always clear cut. That said, it is clear that public-order policing gave rise to incidents throughout the period under review which, even by the standards of the day, involved excessive use of force. Less obvious is the use of violence in routine policing but our knowledge of late-twentieth century incidents combined with the fragmentary evidence from the nineteenth century suggests that there was a degree of routine but out-of-sight police violence that contradicts both the offi-

⁵² The reference is to an incident of maltreatment involving a building labourer reported in the *Middlesbrough weekly News*, 23 November 1866. *The Spectator*, xxviii, (30 April 1864) p.496. Similar sentiments were expressed by George Holyoake in the last decade of the nineteenth century.



cial commitment to minimal force and the popular, though predominantly middle-class, perception of the avuncular bobby.

III

Having looked at the incidence of violence in the policing of nineteenth-century England, it is now time to return to the events of the late-twentieth century with which the essay opened. There can be little doubt that there was a widely-held perception, especially by those who had come to adulthood in the 1940s and 1950s, that events were shockingly at odds with long-established traditions of policing in England but, to a large extent, this shock stemmed from two inter-related but misleading factors: first, an oversimplified and thus sanitized view of the history of English policing; second, the experience of a period of untypically low police/public (and public/police) conflict after the second world war. Viewed in a broader perspective, the violence surrounding the policing of the miners' strike of 1984 had much in common with the policing of industrial disputes in a variety of industries, but notably cotton, coal and transport, in the 1860s or 1900s. Similarly, the broad-based communal opposition to the police in parts of London, Liverpool and Manchester in the 1980s shared similarities with the anti-police riots of the 1850s.

Although tensions and associated levels of conflict waxed and waned over time, reciprocal violence between police and policed was a recurring - and not totally unexpected- phenomenon. More generally, throughout the period under review, the police were still commonly viewed with suspicion. The second world war proved to be something of a watershed. War-time duties, especially in the large cities, greatly enhanced the reputation of the police. Working in often extremely dangerous situations they showed themselves to be efficient and self-sacrificing. It was reassuring to know that the bobbies were doing their job during the black-out. Official opinion was unequivocal. In the words of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary in the report for 1945:



The public appreciation of the police has never been greater, the confidence placed in the police has never been higher, and the relationship between the public and the police service was never better⁵³.

The years following the war were characterised by an unusually high degree of social and political consensus. There were relatively few industrial disputes and, in general terms, society was more disciplined and deferential than the next generation was to be. Not surprisingly in these circumstances police/public relations were less fraught than at any time in the past. Policing took place (or so it seemed) by consent but this was not a golden age of policing. Dixon's world was not replicated in real life even in the early 1950s. New youth cultures, especially Teddy Boys, gave rise to conflict with the police while political protests, most notably associated with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, were not always peaceful. Nonetheless, in the wider context of modern English history, levels of tension and conflict were low. However, this situation was to alter dramatically from the 1960s onwards. The post-war consensus began to fragment as economic growth faltered and cultural changes brought a new, more sceptical, less deferential generation to the fore. Indeed, by the late 1970s there was a clear rejection of the politics of Butskellism by the Conservatives under Thatcher who came to dominate politics in the ensuing years. Aligned with this departure from past consensus was a determination to combat disorder. Street carnivals, demonstrations and industrial actions were lumped together in the simplistic criminology of Margaret Thatcher who could claim:

In their muddled but different ways, the vandals on the picket lines and the muggers in our streets have got the same confused message - 'we want our demands met or else' and 'get out of the way and give us your handbag'⁵⁴.

⁵³ Cited in T. A. CRITCHLEY, *A History of Police in England and Wales*, London, Constable, revised edn., 1976, p.236. See also the endorsement given by the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, who believed 'the reputation of the British police...stands higher than ever before'.

⁵⁴ Cited in M. BRAKE & C. HALE, *Public Order and Private Lives: the politics of law and order*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.15.



The Conservatives made no secret of the importance they attached to the police. Many police chiefs responded and effectively aligned themselves with a political party in a way that cast serious doubt on their impartiality.

Policing also changed in these years. A paramilitary drift can be detected from the mid to late 1960s onwards. The 1968 Grosvenor Square demonstration led to a rethinking of police tactics. In the words of Sir Philip Knights

The choice was to go the continental way and look to water-cannon, riot-gear and all that kind of thing, or to use ordinary flesh and blood policemen in a more controlled and disciplined way⁵⁵.

There was a reluctance to adopt the former course but gradually new methods were introduced, including several, such as rubber bullets, that had been first used in Northern Ireland. The introduction of Special Patrol Groups and Public Support Units, coupled with the introduction of riot-training and new equipment, such as water-cannons and CS gas marked a significant shift away from traditional notions of minimal force to 'hard policing'⁵⁶. Rather than winning by appearing to lose, the new training emphasized shows of force. The police became more pro-active rather than re-active particularly with regard to designated threats to society in the form of militant trade unionists and inner-city dwellers. Certain areas and communities were seen in crude stereotypical terms as 'roughs' or 'enemies within' and policing itself became more high-profile, intrusive and invasive in these areas.

Police treatment of demonstrators and suspects also gave rise to concern. Adverse publicity surrounded the deaths of Keven Gately at anti-National Front demonstration in Red Lion Square in 1974 and Blair Peach at Southall in a similar demonstration in 1979. Nor was

⁵⁵ Cited in G. NORTHAM, *Shooting in the Dark: Riot Police in Britain*, London, Faber & Faber, 1989, p.34.

⁵⁶ The new *Public Order Manual* made clear that short-shield men were intended to 'disperse the crowd and incapacitate missile throwers and ring leaders by striking in a controlled manner about the arms, legs or torso...' Cited in?



the reputation of the police enhanced by such incidents as the Battle of the Beanfield where police actions were seen to involve unacceptable levels of violence. Less spectacular, but ultimately more damaging, was the way in which ethnic minorities were policed, especially in London and the major cities. The Irish had for many years been on the receiving end of police violence and the spread of the IRA bombing campaign to the mainland led to an upsurge of anti-Irish feeling in the 1970s. Increasingly, however, it was the Afro-Caribbean communities (and especially young males) who were most subject to discriminatory policing. It is no coincidence that the major riots of the 1980s were triggered by often relatively small incidents involving the police which revealed a much deeper and wider mistrust and hatred of them. Such feelings were intensified by the notorious miscarriages of justice - notably the Birmingham, Guildford and Woolwich, and Tottenham cases- which raised (and continue to raise) serious doubts about police methods and the criminal justice system.

Two points arise from this analysis of the late-twentieth century 'crisis of policing'. First, the problem of reciprocal violence between the police and the policed was not unprecedented. In many respects, the last quarter of the twentieth century was more 'typical' in historical terms; the third quarter atypically quiet. Second, the problems of the period were largely (but not exclusively) the product of specific political changes, including the overt politicisation of the police, and the economic and social policies which followed from them. The first point alerts us to the need to recognize that policing and violence commonly go together; the second draws our attention to the fact that there is nothing inevitable about this and that political action, in its broadest sense, can bring change. Many expert judgements of the 1990s predict a worsening of police/public relations and there are good reasons to accept this analysis but it does not have to be so - there are choices to be made, in part, by a narrow band of politicians but also, and more importantly, by a broader band of people⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ For a pessimistic interpretation, see J. BENYON, *Disadvantage, Politics and Disorder: Social Disintegration and Conflict in Contemporary Britain*, Leicester, Centre for the Study of Public Order, University of Leicester, 1993.